Poetry and Communism in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Balkans

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Poetry of
Vaclav Havel and Visar Zhiti

Communist Holocaust 100+ million dead

- **The Black Book of Communism**: Crimes, Terror, Repression is a 1997 book edited by Stéphane Courtois, who includes contributions by **several European academics** documenting a history of repressions, both political and civilian, by Communist states.
- The book was originally published in France by Éditions Robert Laffont. In the United States it is published by **Harvard University Press**.

THE DEATH TOLL OF COMMUNISM

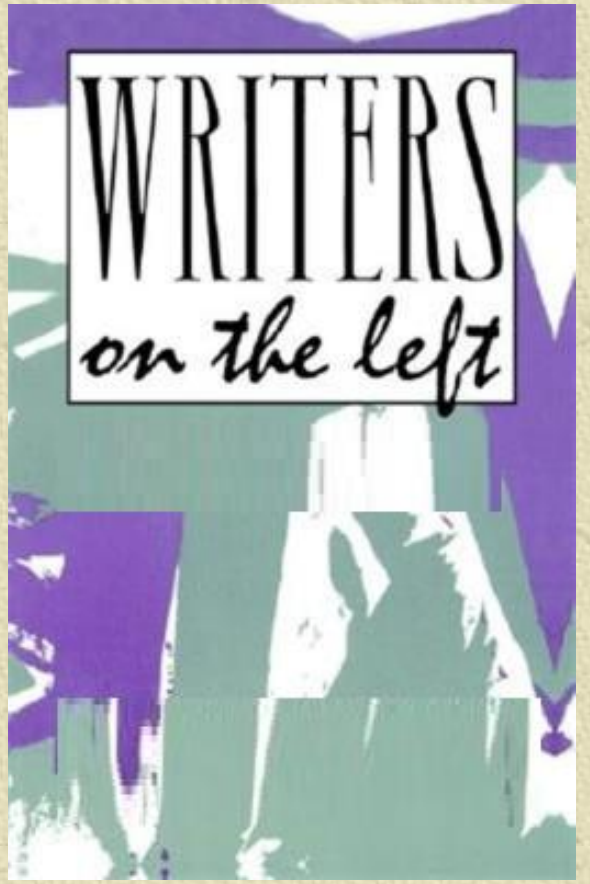
65 MILLION IN CHINA
20 MILLION IN THE SOVIET UNION
2 MILLION IN CAMBODIA
2 MILLION IN NORTH KOREA
1.7 MILLION IN AFRICA
1.5 MILLION IN AFGHANISTAN
1 MILLION IN THE COMMUNIST STATES OF EASTERN EUROPE
1 MILLION IN VIETNAM
150,000 IN LATIN AMERICA
SOURCE: BLACK BOOK OF COMMUNISM

1945:Balkans & Eastern Europe fall to communism

- In 1945 Albania and Bulgaria both became communist. East Germany also became a Soviet zone, but did not have its own communist government until 1949 when it became the German Democratic Republic. Romania, Poland and Hungary all fell to communist rule in 1947 and Czechoslovakia in 1948.
- Moscow now had its western buffer zone and the 'Iron Curtain'(an idea first expressed by Winston Churchill) had descended, dividing Europe geographically, politically and ideologically. Although, theoretically, these countries were now under central rule from Moscow, they were independent nation states with their own governments.
- By 1948 the face of Europe, especially in the East, had changed. It would remain this way until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Poetry and Communism

- In the last century, some truly great poets, in almost all languages on earth, have been communists.
- In an explicit or formal way, for example, the following poets were committed to communism: in Turkey, Nâzim Hikmet; in Chile, Pablo Neruda; in Spain, Rafael Alberti; in Italy, Eduardo Sanguinetti; in Greece, Yannis Ritsos; in China, Ai Qing; in Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish; in Peru, César Vallejo.
- In Germany, the shining example is above all Bertolt Brecht.

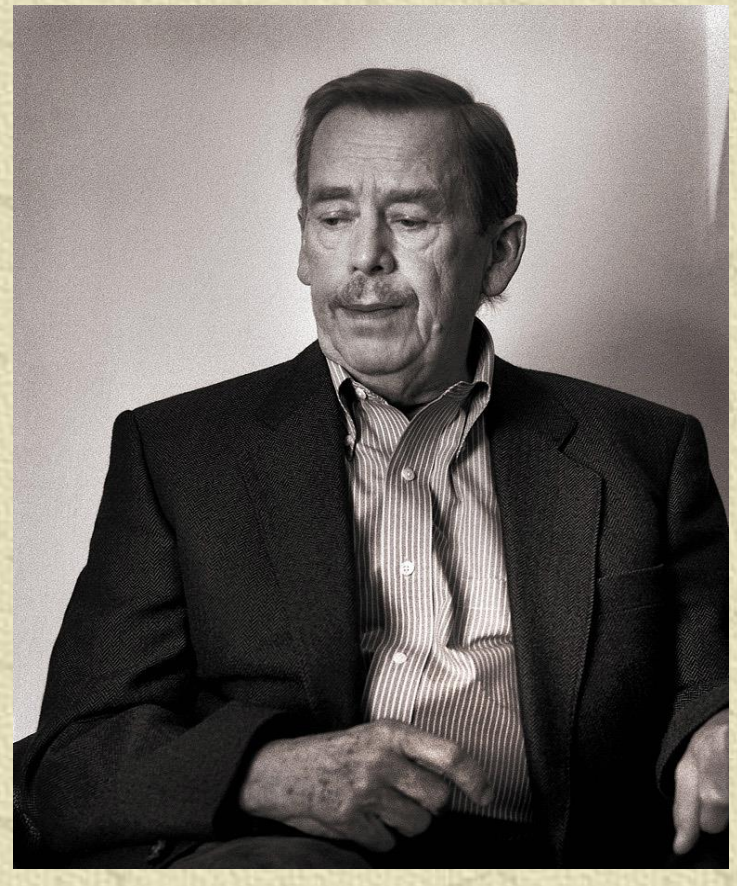


The Anti Communists Writers

- However, the years of totalitarian communist rule were dark and dismal days for thousands of writers.
- Those writers who did not comply with socialism were put in prison, sent in concentration camps, and some times killed.
- Today I will talk about two well-known writers who were put in prison, because of their writing.

Vaclav Havel and Visar Zhiti

Vaclav Havel



Visar Zhiti

Vaclav Havel:
The Power of The Pen

A poem by Vaclav Havel

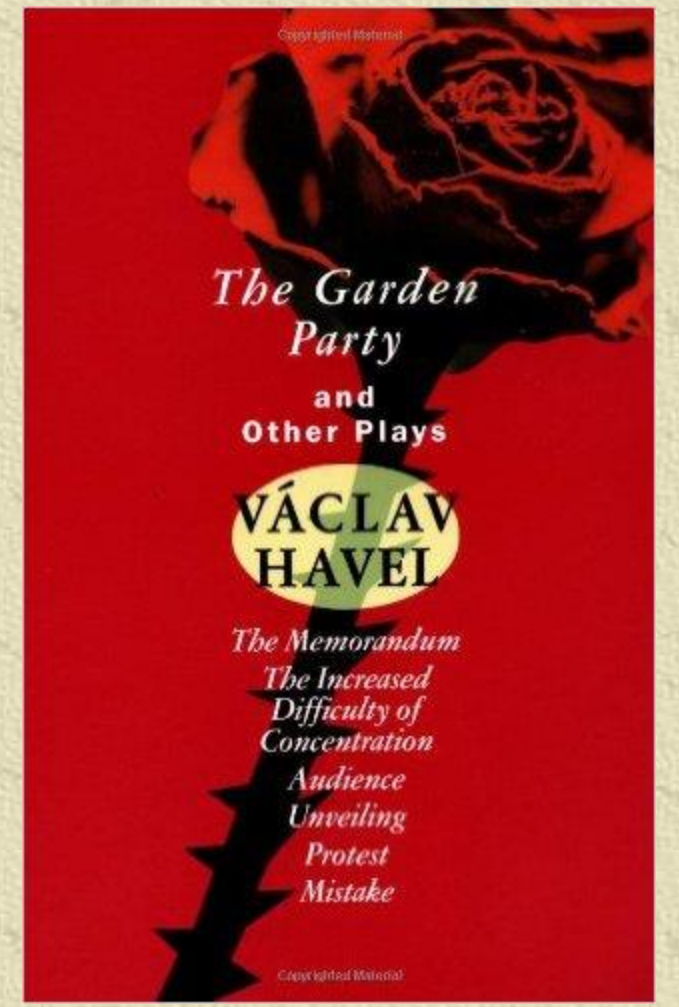
- **It is I Who Must Begin**

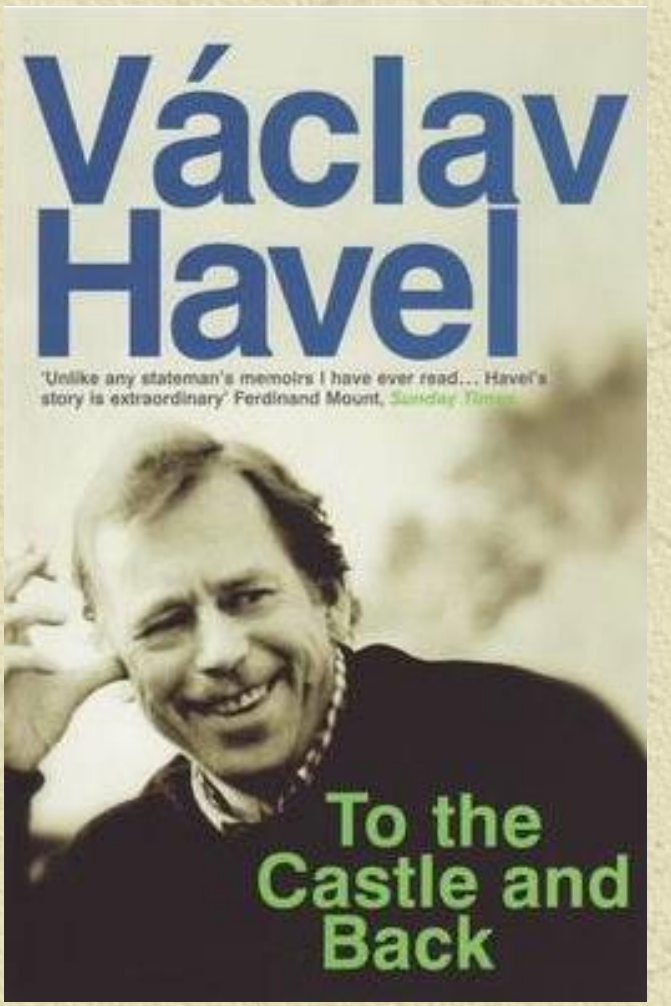
It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try --
here and now,
right where I am,
not excusing myself
by saying things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
-- to live in harmony
with the "voice of Being," as I
understand it within myself
-- as soon as I begin that,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
nor the most important one
to have set out
upon that road.

Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.

by Vaclav Havel
from Teaching With Fire

Vaclav Havel Published Over 40 Books

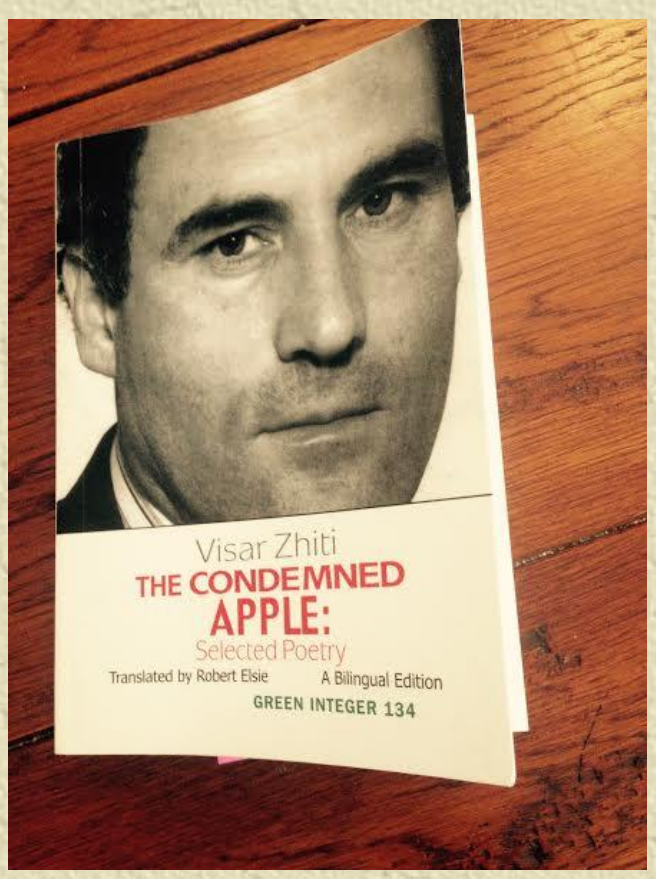



Václav Havel
'Unlike any stateman's memoirs I have ever read... Havel's story is extraordinary' Ferdinand Mount, Sunday Times
To the Castle and Back

Visar Zhiti: Life is less than hope

- **Visar Zhiti** is the Albanian writer whose life and works perhaps best mirror the history of his nation.
- He was one of the many to have suffered appalling persecution for no apparent reason. But Visar Zhiti survived – physically, intellectually and emotionally, and he is now among the most popular poets of present-day Albania.
- Despite the paucity of literary translations from the Albanian, Visar Zhiti's verse has been appreciated abroad and he has received notable international recognition.

Visar Zhiti: Awarded the Italian "Leopardi d'oro"



- In 1991, he was awarded the Italian "Leopardi d'oro" prize for poetry and in 1997 the prestigious "Ada Negri" prize.
- He is a member of the Alfonso Grassi International Academy of Art and has taken part in many international poetry festivals in recent years.
- After a long career as a cultural attaché , in April 2013 he was appointed Minister of Tourism, Cultural Affairs, Youth and Sports.
- Currently he is the Ambassador of Albania in Vatican City.

A poem by Visar Zhiti

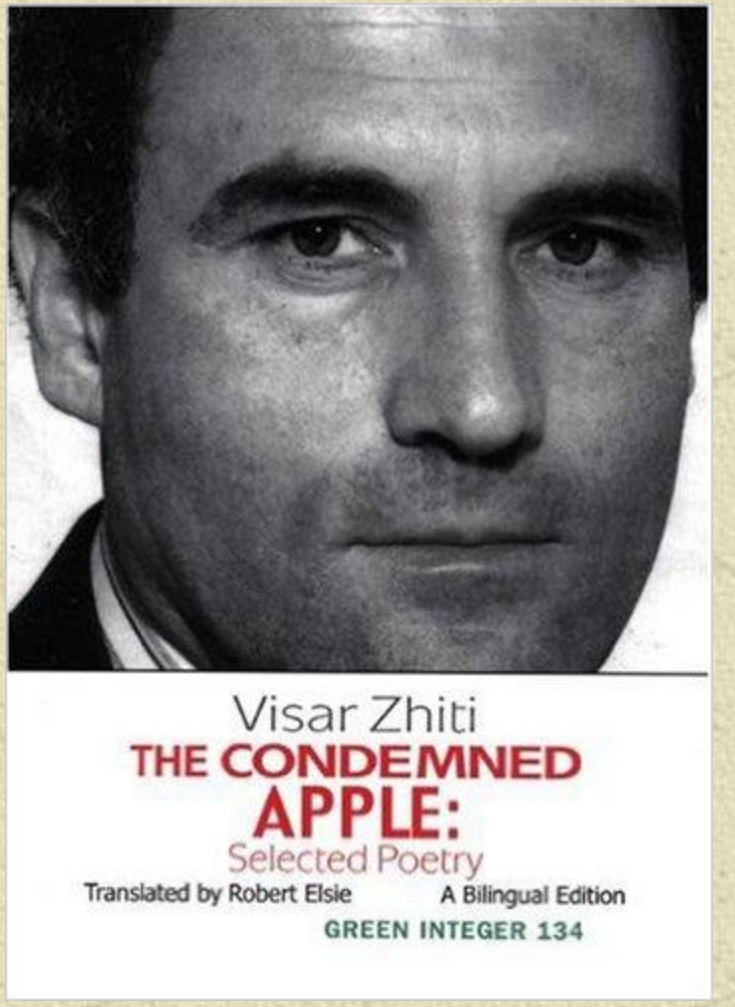
- **THE EPILOGUE (OF WHICH TIME MAKES A PREFACE)**

Life is less than hope.
And, still, I write poems
Though no one reads them.
Perhaps the wind does not read the stars at night,
Maybe the cliffs at the seaside
Feel nothing of the fury of the waves.
And, still, I write poems,
Which have destroyed my life. For seven years
They shrouded my body in barbed wire.
They shredded my skin and torrents of life flowed like torrents of blood
down to the tips of my toes.

But I did not lose my soul, not all of mysoul,
Bits and pieces I pulled out
Of the fissures of my body
and sent them back
to love,
to poetry.
With little, tiny bits of soul,
Like bees who have lost their way,
I now live on.
And when you consider
that even inscriptions on gravestones have readers,
You come to realize that poetry is greater than hope.

Visar Zhiti Author of Over 15 Published Books

- **The Condemned Apple: Selected Poetry (Green Integer)**
- As Janice Mathie-Heck makes clear in her introduction, Visar Zhiti lived a life of great privation: locked away in dictator Enver Hoxha's prisons, Zhiti was not allowed pencil or paper. He wrote his poems in his mind, and he and other prisoners committed them to memory, in part to keep their sanity and to enliven the terrible lives they were forced to bear. Only when Hoxha fell from power and the political prisoners were freed was Zhiti's poetry brought to print.
- Now English-speaking readers can share in the remarkably gentle and imagistically rich poems produced out of Zhiti's years of suffering.



Thank You!

спасибо
谢谢
GRACIAS
THANK YOU
ありがとうございました
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धन्यवाद
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